WRITERS AS SOCIAL ACTIVISTS - A SOCIO-POLITICAL APPROACH TO LITERARY WRITING

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CHAPTER-1

INTRODUCTION

The struggle for entitlements has been vigorously manifesting as an ongoing saga of peoples' expressions to threats and opportunities. People have striven to survive for rights to a decent livelihood, equality, freedom from discriminatory practices and access to opportunities. The Indian National Movement for Independence of the 1930s and 40s and Abolitionist Movement which began in the early 19th century proved that collective action could pave the way for rethinking and redesigning our world through new insights like that of Enlightenment and Modernism.Simultaneously, as a response to collective public expressions, art and literature started taking new forms of representations, by involving and co-opting this bulk of readers and consumers of aesthetics.The key components for such collective mobilization are the Activists who utilize Social Movements as the crucible for their training either by influencing or being influenced collectively, as actors in the drama of dissent or contestation. One tool of activism is that of weaving strategies through songs, ballads, narratives and stories to disseminate, preserve and record by word of mouth or the printed page, the injustices meted out to the people, race or resources.

Significance of the Study

Art especially creative writing, introduces disorder by questioning or analyzing settled notions and lifestyles. It promotes the development of alterity, critical to the survival of a multicultural society and also encourages empathetic and critical thinking. Art can furnish the means to make a society resilient by providing spaces for ventilation. Stories are thus activist in nature, whatever genre they may be in, as

they spur people towards some form of action, reaction or transformation.Literatureis also an ideology, as it shares an intimate bond with the way society interprets and perceives itself so there is always an active association between Literature and Politics. Many literary movements have been based on contesting, questioning or re-establishing the way aesthetics is created, interpreted or understood by different classes of people and their interests. This is essentially a political shift as it becomes a portal for furnishingworld views that exist outside of the established and consolidated world of experiences.Creative writing is also an act of deliberation, choice and engagement therefore, it is natural to consider all literary texts as sites of struggle and contestations be it from the readers' or writers' perspectives. It constructs or deconstructs systems and structures of thought, making literature an extremely vibrant medium for knowledge making.Modern Creative Writing has become a reader-centric enterprise gaining more relevance. Such shifts can also be delineated as a product of activist strategies initiated by writers. Postmodernist writers deeply explore the links between narrative, ideology and politics as the individual in this context is not a static construct of hand-me-down ideologues, but an active creator of his own destiny. As what we write is contingent on what we include or exclude and how we conceive these inclusions and exclusions, literary theory too has undergone a change, experimenting and exploring with new forms and techniques. These new active and proactive processes of knowledge making and thereby identity creations, which remain an indispensable part of the New Social Movements require a re-visitation of the literary terrain, seen through the lens of Activism.Further, Globalization has influenced the domain of creative writing in many ways by creating local and global spaces for organized contestations. This means that wehave a changing andchanged reader-writer profile. Thus the contexts

and content of creative writing has undergone change in its roles and impact, thereby enhancingthe importance and relevance of artists as activist- participants or generators of Social Movements.

Research Questions

A symbiotic relationship exists between a writer and his world wherein the writer is provided the nutrients for creative growth. In turn, does the output of the writer in mould the environment, which sustains him?In such a context, content that activates change may become more important in future. Taking this scenario into consideration, I have explored whether it is possible to engage more seriously with the role of the writer in the socio-political dynamics of change.This is not to suggest that such a relationship did not exist before. It has always been the writers' burden to carry the double-edged sword of social responsibility even when creativity expressed itself against the grain of the majority. That was long ago and the creative terrain has transformed considerably since then.I have attempted to find out whether thewriters responded to the proliferation of knowledge making techniques, expanding informed readership, changed consumption patterns and the spawning of popular culture. If they have done so, either for preservation of their kind or for making writing more relevant and impactful, than it could probably be presumed an activist contestation. So, if we assume that the writer is invested with a sharpened sensibility does the writer through his or her individual, global or local experience and multicultural identity, choice or position mature into an activist who can steer the course of political and social history?But of course, some writers are also of the view that they are on a journey of personal discovery so, such a preordained agenda for activist campaign may not exist.

Social Activism through the writers' forum is perforce bourgeoning into an interesting field of study. Are Social Movements gaining currency by utilizing the literary space, and ripening into a distinct voice?Is Political agenda being translated into policies and programmes through literary experience? Has the borderline between writing for art's sake and writing for a purpose been erased by a multidisciplinary approach to the study of literature itself? In a multicultural terrain and a postmodern globalized world where anti-global and alter global activist strategies are being propelled as drivers for creating spaces for fueling New Social Movements has writing carved a niche within this framework?To consider these questions, the hypothesis of the research sought to explore the trajectory of SMs and NSMs, Activism and their intra or inter linkages. It hasattempted to analyze creative writing as an Activist strategy and thereby examine its impact on society through reader-response and the trajectory of creative writing in the context of postmodernism, multiculturalism, popular culture and globalization. Thereby I have tried to understand whether there is an emerging relationship between activist creative writing and SMs.Could this become the broader concern of literary studies? These issues seem to mandate a study of the age-old relationship between a writer and his world in the collective sphere with an orientation to creative writing as an activist strategy.The search also explored two prolific and profuse writer activists of the Indian literary scenarioby highlighting the Indian writers who have essayed and are essaying this dual role and who have made activist writing their calling though they may not put it in so many words. But it could not limit itself to a geographical area or a time period for the reason that it would have made it too piecemeal in approach. I have chosentwo writersfor the purpose of trying to illustrate the processes of these linkages. I have not tried to explore many writers

who equally merit close scrutiny because I only wanted to illustrate the perspective that I have gained through this study, by selecting samples. So, to maintain gender balance I selected a man and a woman writerTaking many writers would havemade my research project too unmanageable. Iwanted contemporaneity in articulations as well as experience in the contributions of the writers I chose. Hence, two veteran writers have been taken for the very purposes mentioned.

Objectives of the Study

Social Movements in the context of how they are related to Activism and the creative writers were examined. Creative Writing has become one such activist tactic as it aspires to access proactive readership or create a proactive readership. Examining creative writing as an activist strategy was one of the important aims of this study. As creative writing is also competing with popular culture and alternative visual mediums, the study discusses this contemporary relationship between literary writing and its ability to compete with other interfaces. Further, alterity and inclusiveness, the two hallmarks of postmodern literature, are also widening the trajectory of activist creative writing. So the linkages among postmodernism popular culture and literary writing have been examined. Creative writing is also an engagement from the writer and reader perspective. This engagement involves choices of inclusion and exclusion, deeming any decision, political. Further, the global literary landscape is witnessing a paradigm shift due to the proliferation of knowledge producing and disseminating technologies and is creating a Social Movement in the knowledge making domain. The research navigated through how Activism and Creative Writing has become a part of the knowledge making process under the umbrella of globalization.

Research Methodology:

The study uses the descriptive method for providing an overview of the conceptual evolution of Social Movements and its relational status to Activism; it thereby focuses on creative writing as a fulcrum of activist strategy. I have used the historical, descriptive and analytical method to explore the trajectory ofSocial Activism and the meaning and significance of Creative Writing. It has also examined and analyzedthe similarities, differences and linkages among these three major components of the study, namely, Social Movements, Activism and Creative Writing. I have also explored the experience and lived realities of writer- activists, by sourcing primary and secondary data to fulfil my objectives. Sourced materials include books, journals, articles and the like. Discussions with thelate writer- activist Dr. U. R. Ananthamurthy isused as primary data, for enhancing the quality of the research. Firstly, I wanted to try to locate a part of my study within the context of Karnataka and he was also a visible constituent of knowledge making in the post globalized world as a public intellectual. Moreover, as a direct participant in the Navya Chaluvali or the Modern Literary Movement in Kannada Literature and the farmers' movement impacted by Ram Manohar Lohia's ideology, he merits attention as a writer activist. He also sustained an interest in the postmodern contestations of environmental concerns, issues of democracy, governance and Swaraj as a conscientious proactive citizen with a responsibility to initiate discourses in the public sphere Recording his own views regarding the conceptions of a writer-activist in general, as also his own perception of himself as a writer activist has lent substance to my thesis.In exploring the writer as an active, forward-looking free-thinking intellectual with social concerns that she articulates through her works, I have also tried to understand the orientations of the Bengali Bhasha writer,

Mahaswetha Devi as a writer and social activist. She is considered without doubt, to be one of the foremost writer –activists of the Indian literary terrain so the thesis cannot be complete without a visitation of her contributions.In trying to follow her journey as a writer-activist, I have used the translations of her creative works and her journalistic writings to delve into her contributions as a writer and activist.As a woman writer, a Bengali litterateur who is a part of the impressive reformist writers' tradition and as a generator and motivator of grass root participation who has taken part in the traumatic, momentous and radical political occurrences in the Indian terrain, she has proved to be a true change maker in the lives of many rendered invisible and mute. She is one of the important constituents of the New Social Movements.

CHAPTER II

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS- A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Society,an aggregate of the cultural and intellectual legacy,provides the stage for contestations.The origins and evolution of SMs as study of collective behaviour, starting from sociologists like Max Weber and Emile Durkheim and thinkers like Karl Marx who talk about collective action and intra-class communication and its mobilizations, has later developed into different schools of thought giving rise to varied definitions and approaches. As this is a multi-disciplinary area with Sociologists, Political Scientists, Culture Theorists, Anthropologists and Psychologists contributing to Movement Studies, only a broad consensus can be culled out. There have been many schools of thought that have developed arising out of the different approaches to the study of SMs, namely,The Classical School-Collective Behaviour and Social Movement Research (CBSM),Mass Society Theory,The Resource Mobilization Theory (RM)The Political Process Theory (PP).

Social Movements (SMs) have evolved into New Social Movements (NSMs) and these NSMs as aphenomenon arrived with the advent of decolonization and with the entry of computers, revolutionized markets, market strategies, mass consumers and the media. One major propellant of NSMs is the advent of Globalization. NSMs have attempted to synthesize the different streams of thought that had emerged earlier in movement studies. In fact, dynamic SMs are incubating new strategies and practices commensurate with the postmodern, multicultural world. Culture theorists and Identity oriented theorists have contributed to widen and deepen the spectrum of movement studies in NSMs wherein culture and identity formation are vital constituents of Movements.

Moving on to the Indian scenario**,** there exists a deeply embedded relationship between religious movements and societal reform in India. The collective memory of people not only has been expressed in newer forms of practices, beliefs and worships, but has also led to novel strategies for eradicating deep seated social malaise practiced in the name of religion. One such path breaking measure is the Bhakti Movement, which broke new ground by making available, the sanctified texts of the upper castes, forbidden to the lower castes, through the vernacular medium by the Bhakti saints and seers. Later, colonization became the verdant site for conflicts in all spheres of life, enlisting the support of numerous activist-reformist-writers to crystallize conditions for change in India.Reformist movementsgradually transformed India from a pre-modern, orthodox, inward looking society to a modern, forward looking and expansive society. Later, the Indian Independence Movement became the first full bodied mass movement with Secularism, egalitarianism, socialism, communism, development through capitalism and socialtransformation to modernism becoming the byproducts of the movement for freedom.In post-Independent India, the License Raj, regional imbalances in growth, continuing caste oppression, resource crunch, the rise of extreme right wing nationalists, rampant urbanization and industrialization, technological growth, loss of agrarian lands,an increasing labour force,women's claims to inclusive growth, universal adult franchise, slow but gradual rise in readership and writing, India had arrived into a modern era without traversing through a process of evolutionary growth.Indian SMs grew in such conditions of brewing thoughts, ideologues, experiments and collective and individual participation. The overarching goals after Independence were nation-building and development with social justice.

CHAPTER III

ACTIVISM - A SOCIO-POLITICAL ANALYSIS

Activism emerged in the early 1900s to define a philosophy that assumed an active existence of everything. In the 1960s it was a form of political activity that limited its scope to dissent,believed to be articulated by a fervent minority, like in trade unions, or practiced by those who were against war and environmental degradation. The cause trajectory has progressed since then, from materialistic needs, to post-materialist issues like environmentalism, multiculturalism, globalization and gender justice. There is a thin line demarcating strategies as violent or non-violent in Activism as what is a just cause and a fair price to pay for one group like the Naxalites may seem anti-national to the people who are not affected by land displacement and exploitation. Applied methods have to be analyzed individually in their contexts to decipher whether acts are violent or purely non-conventional protests. The common thread that links all kinds of activism is the issue of equality, respect and dignity in life. It is purposeful and oriented and thrives on mutual interdependence among groups, Social Movements, organisations, volunteers and part-time activists, full time activists and supporters of the cause.

The scope and range of Activism is broad and diverse involving immigration issues, and urbanization challenges, which are important activist domains. The cyber networks provision inclusivity, diversity, flexibility, mobility, economy, adaptability and leaderless options for empowerment through collective contestations. It has enabled activists by adding another tool for increasing the canvas of protest strategies. Ultimately, it is a tool in the hands of humans, limited by humans' skill and intent. The relationship between a Social Movement and Activism is also significant as it is the relationship of the parts to that of the aggregate, the aggregate

being the Social Movement and the activists, its individual components. Activists are catalyzing actors of movementsAccording to some theorists, Activists are the bonding forces who through their stories, songs, and language, art and creative strategies, facilitate solidarity in a Social Movement. The environs of political exclusion where there is monopoly or concentration of power is being robustly challenged through activist and movement repertoires as more actors especially from the earlier precluded categories like the middle class, homemakers and senior citizens are getting involved. Another important development in the domain of Activism is the recognition of limitations of the left oriented, Marxist class struggle especially in the realm of women-centric issues. The gap among the established intellectual and the in- movement intellectual who organically evolve from the grass roots has reduced considerably, making intellectual participation and production of intellect that more democratic.

A very important development in the global current scenario in the domain of activism is that of the convergence of Movements and forms as well as strategies the world over- the result of a realization that Activists are facing a triple threat globally- Firstly, from that of the corporate world; secondly, from the co-option of many issue-based NGOs by Corporates through their CSR; thirdly, the plurality of local struggles and the danger of homogenization of struggles leading to its ultimate decimation. It has promoted pluralism and brought anti-globalization and anti-war movement participants together on a global scale.Thus through the decade, activism has grown from being considered violent aggravations to intellectually creative endevours and transformed the tenor and fervor of movements.

CHAPTER IV

WRITERS AS SOCIAL ACTIVISTS

Performing Arts and Literature like street theatre, music, dance, poetry, painting and the like are all vehicles of expression for confirmation, legitimization, preservation or dissent of conceptions, perceptions, lifestyles, ideologues and ethos. Literature is a medium of mutual engagement which crosses boundaries of time and space. Robert Frost, the Modern American poet depicts Literature as a performance in words, bringing it that much closer to Activism as activism is also a performance enacted for a public cause. It should be kept in mind of course, that disengagement is also a process of engagement. Literature refers to a body of works that are significant within a given context of culture, time and people, therefore are preserved, interpreted, produced, reproduced and re-visited. It could refer to written works, orature, fiction or non-fiction, poetry, prose, short story, drama. In the postmodern context it also refers to a gamut of arts like graffiti.It is also mutable, turbulent and an open medium for transacting and evolving or revising ideologies or meaning making. In effect, the book as a conscious creative work, changes or alters the writer. The reader too, who enters the book is not the same after he or she exits it. This does not mean that all the literary texts change lives; some do, some don't and some become powerful, much later. But every text carries within it the germinating seed for change, waiting for the right conditions.

The literary text also responds to the contexts. Culture Studies as a cultural text in the first part of the 20th century and Multiculturalism as an ideological strain, in the last four decades of the 20th century has generated shifts and influenced creative writing in tremendous ways. A need for culturally conscious literature is emerging, creating a mosaic pattern of literary landscapes. Extensive plurality has now become a marker of current literature. Multiculturalism has provided the legitimacy to

question assumed objectionable inclusions in literature, as much as interrogate the exclusions.

Another major phenomenon for recalibrating the creative spectrum is the entry of popular culture into the cultural ethos of the West, in particular, the 1950s of America, creating an artistic upheaval in the contexts and texts of the Art World. Popular culture is the child of industrialization and urbanization.Popular culture included intellectuals or producers of ideas and ideologies, writers, who set the parameters of culture and taste. The multicultural approach mandates the recognition of difference and equality and such a necessary balance is a challenge indeed. As a state policy, an approach and a philosophy, multiculturalism becomes a solution to erasure of discrimination in society as well as precipitator of a restless citizenry. It is the problem and the solution. That is why dysphoric themes have become more visible and popular in current literature.

Indian Bhasha literature coexists in the global literary landscape as a rich tradition of the "Desi" (native, local, oral) along with the "Marga" (classical, canonical) tradition, enriching each other continuously. I am exploring the writer as an active, forward-looking free-thinking intellectual; as one who voices his concerns about socio-political and cultural issues and the status of writing as is seen by the writer with social concerns, thereby making him an activist. U. R. Ananthamurthy is placed in the Navya tradition, which is perceived as a movement owing to the extensive use of modern techniques and applications of a certain kind of sensibilityAmong the Navya writers one cannot forget the towering influence Ram Manohar Lohia and Shanteevira Gopala Gowda. These leaders and their ideological contours have impacted this writer-intellectualand also promoted activism among the literati. Lohia's ideological impact, became a key influence on the Social Movements and

thereby the literary movements in Karnataka. U. R. Ananthamurthy has demonstrated through his creative output and his active engagement with society that, the journey of an activist writer is a struggle on both ends- as a writer and as a public intellectual with activist orientations.

Mahaswetha Devi stands today as one of the foremost respected woman writer – activists not only in Bengali literature but also in Indian creative writing. She is revered not only for her starkly realistic and hard hitting creative output among the towering Bengali literary traditions, but also for her untiring efforts to alleviate and share the untold miseries of the marginalized tribes, adivasis and peasants rendered invisible after Independence.She has recorded distortions in developments, exploitation by the nexus of power cartels, forgotten historical anecdotes and people struggles preserved in folklore and legends, differential perceptions of struggles of the marginalized in their desire to find conducive alternatives to living. In tune with the New Social Movements and movement- intellectual traditions, she has focused on issues like gender, ethnicity, tribal displacements, environment and ecology and land depletion and cultural, political, social and environmental erosions. Her work is seminal and post-modernist, as it recovers the saga of life of communities on the fringes of an Indian society, encapsulated but remaining isolated from the narrative of development.

Both these Bhasha writers chose to write in their own mother tongues namely Kannada and Bengali respectively though they held a post graduate degree in English literature. This in itself constitutes an engagement with the readership in particular and society at large.Both vociferously stood and stand for what they thought were and are the social concerns of their time place and context but have been different in their approaches to either creative writing or social activism. Both

have impacted future generations of writers/thinkers in their own way, allowing the seed of ideas and action to germinate and grow. This section draws the similarities and distinguishes their distinctive styles in operationalizing their activist concerns through the creative medium of writing.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Down the highways and by-lanes of the creative roads, writers have responded to these vibrant and aggressive trends of the constantly changing world orders and knowledge crucibles through what they do the best and the most-writing! Whether it was in the reformist era or the predominantly oral tradition, one has seen that literary engagement has been a constant tool for redressal. The aggregation of such creative expressions is simultaneously, a challenge and a channel for change. Needless to say that fulfilling such goals that guarantee fundamental rights, dignity and well-being to living and non-living entities are vital to the health of a community and its habitat.

I have attempted to present that the right to be heard and exist can be operationalized in the globalized world through social activism as a process and creative writing, as its complementary instrument. Creative writing is a tool of representation or projection that attempts actualizing the ideal and mediates among the readers and the potential readers or the unlettered, making writing a form of activism. In effect, it is apparent that the world through NSMs, Activism and intra or international conversations is working towards convergence of Movements. In a multicultural terrain and a postmodern globalized world where anti-global and alter global activist strategies are being propelled as drivers for creating spaces for fueling New Social Movements, creative or literary writing has without doubt carved a niche space for itself . In this sense, literary writing is taking on newer roles for itself by become a means to a more serious engagement with the local and global challenges. With multiculturalism as a context I have also discussed how literary writing has gotten involved in these broader concerns of living in a multicultural

world through constructive and concerted dissemination of information of pluralities in identity and existence. So also in addressing challenges posed by post modernism, literary writing has moved the margins to the center by providing spaces for alterities in life and ideas, thereby celebrating differences be it in writing or choice of content or addressing a changed readership.

This does not mean that creative writers who have used their literary skills to leverage activist concerns have always been successful or extremely effective in essaying this dual role. Much yet needs to be done and the impact is contingent on the level of awareness, readership profile and access, as well as the democratic traditions of dissent and its effective use and applications. To sum up, it would not be too hyperbolic to state that the way of the word is the way of the world. It mandates our perceptions and conceptions; awakens our critical faculties and generates healthy currents or undercurrents of mental churning/cleansing, thereby assisting us in updating or unloading unwanted baggage and recording or documenting necessary relocations. In effect, a change in thought is a change in deed. Literature thus is becoming the carriage that transports the cartloads of ideas, propelled by the fuel of Activism to reach a destination called Change.

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